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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined high-income mothers' views toward their children in relation to those of lower-income levels and attitudes toward educational segregation are presented in this paper. Conducted as part of a broader examination of social class influences on schooling, this study is based on interviews conducted with 20 high-income mothers in a small midwestern city. Findings indicate that affluent parents viewed their own children as more intelligent and competent than those of the poor and pushed for advanced separate school situations. Respondents adhered to the cultural deprivationist philosophy of socialization and believed that public schools were inadequate for their children but satisfactory for low-income children. They viewed schools as meritocracies and favored increased social control in the schools, simultaneous with increased rewards for the winners, or their children. Five tables are included. (31 references) (LMI)

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Barriers to Integrated Schools and Classrooms: Affluent Parents' Perceptions of their Own and Other People's Children
AERA 1992 Annual Conference, San Francisco

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Objective:

This paper reports the results of an interview study with high-income mothers, documenting: (1) how they view their children (i.e., children of their social class) as superior to children of the poor, and (2) how they press for segregating and stratifying practices to accommodate perceived pupil differences.

Perspective:

The findings of this study are consistent with tenets of critical theory that maintain that people perceive the world along social class lines and act according to their social class interests.

INTRODUCTION

Considerable research has focused on the link between parental values and children's behavior, particularly achievement behavior. Goodnow, Knight, and Cashmore (1986) have theorized that parenting behaviors; that is, styles of socialization of children, involve schemas (i.e., interrelated patterns of perceptions, values, and behaviors) which vary according to socioeconomic status. Beliefs--supposedly distinct for members of different social classes--are said to be cognitive mediators of interaction between parents and children especially influencing children's responses to children's school-related behaviors (Harkness & Super, 1985; Hess, 1981; Kohn, 1983).

A common social construct is that low-income parents' aspirations for their children are not as high as their affluent counterparts, but research indicates that regardless of their own educational attainment, low-income parents are not apathetic about their children's schooling and value high achievement (Brantlinger, 1985; Johnson & Ransom, 1980). In fact, such parents often express ambition for their children in terms of dissatisfaction with their own lot and refer to themselves as models to be avoided (Brantlinger, 1985; Newson, Newson, & Barnes, 1977). It is true, however, that parents' aspirations for their children are influenced by the judgments of others; that is, parents modify their initial aspirations to reflect feedback from schools (Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978; Seginer, 1983).

Although there is an increasing dependence of educational attainment on social origin, low-income parents' values and behaviors have been found to have little or no impact on educational outcomes (Bugetal, 1985; Maccoby & Martin, 1983;

Mare, 1981; Morgan, Alwin, & Griffin, 1979; Scott-Jones, 1984). So, in spite of the predominant belief in the negative effects of low-income parents, much of offspring school performance is not accounted for by their values. In fact, children's socioeconomic status accounts for more variance in school achievement than does family configuration (Henderson, 1981). Hence there is a need to explore other possible causal factors in the social class and school achievement correlation.

The educational conditions facing low-income populations have received considerable attention in recent literature (e.g., Fine, 1991; Page, 1992) and these have included some detail of low-income people's views of these circumstances. In contrast, little is known about the perceptions of high-income parents. It has been documented that school personnel are influenced by affluent parents' pressures on them to structure schools to the advantage of their children rather than in terms of the general educational welfare of all students (Olson, 1983; Sieber, 1982). However, the scarcity of such research makes it imperative that studies related to educational equity focus not only on those who are affected negatively by inequitable practices but also on those who currently benefit from them.

This article addresses high-income parents' views of their own offspring and of children of lower income levels as well as their views of how schools should accommodate the perceived differences. It should provide insight into the messages high-income children receive from their parents about the nature of their intelligence and their competency as students. It should also give evidence of the demands made on school personnel by high-income parents.

METHOD

This study is part of a comprehensive examination of social class influences on schooling which included community and school observation, probes into particular school practices (tracking, zoning, distribution of material and human resources), attendance at school events, interviews with school personnel, and interviews with high- and low-income parents and adolescents. Although a multifaceted research design was used for the broader study, this report focuses on interviews with high-income parents. A hermeneutic/ interpretive research design (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Young, 1990) was judged to be a productive way to get accurate and deep information from these respondents. The approach was hermeneutic in its attempt to see things the way respondents see them and interpretive in that results were analyzed according to the researchers' knowledge of parenting as well as relationships among people of different social classes.

Setting

The study was conducted in a midwestern city (population approximately 60,000) which is dominated by a large state university. Low-income residents are primarily located on the west side of town and high-income on the east side. In addition to residential separation of the social classes, there is a

noticeable lack of interaction between high- and low-income townspeople in all dimensions of their life -- they attend separate churches, elementary schools, social events, and even shop at different stores.

Participants

Twenty high-income parents, equivalent to Anyon's (1980) "affluent professional" class, were selected from neighborhoods where houses listed in the realtor's guide ranged between 70 to 200 thousand dollars. (In 1990 the average house in the city sold for about $60,000.). Intentional identification procedures assured that parents from all the high-income schools in the city were represented. When the households were called and asked for a "parent" participant, it was typical for women to answer the telephone and agree to involvement. They were told that fathers could also take part, but only one man sat in on an interview and he did not participate in it. Data on mothers' occupations and educational attainment were collected (see Tables 1 and 2). Of the 20 mothers, 3 were divorced.

TABLE 1: Occupations of High-Income Mothers

	N	%
Professionals	15	75%
writer/editor/researcher	5	25%
teacher/librarian	5	25%
administrator	3	15%
professor	2	10%
Clerical	1	5%
Homemaker	4	20%

TABLE 2: Educational Attainment of Mothers

highest degree earned	N	%
Doctorate	4	20%
Masters, Plus	3	15%
Masters	7	35%
Bachelors, Plus	1	5%
Bachelors	4	20%
Attended College, 2 years	1	5%

Interview Protocol

Open-ended, flexible sets of questions were developed in order to generate elaborated narratives and to avoid forcing participants into predetermined response categories. An attempt was made to transfer the maximum amount of control of the dialogue to participants by encouraging them to express their own feelings and opinions, expand on ideas, conjecture about causation, and supply rationale for their replies. Instead of confining the interviews to questions, parents were asked to picture their children in school, describe their images, evaluate their feelings in the scenes imagined, and discuss the reasons behind what was happening. Initial drafts of the interview protocol were used in pilot interviews with non-participant parents.

The interview protocol included three consequetive stages of questioning:

Stage 1: Broad/neutral questions (e.g., "What are the strengths and weaknesses of public education today?" "How does/did your children's educational experience compare to your own?").

Stage 2: Broad, open-ended questions but focused on social class (e.g., "Can students get an equivalent education at any school in town?" "What do low-income parents think about the social class differences in local schools?").

Stage 3: Specific scenarios related to social class or school administrative arrangements (e.g., "Suppose that local schools were rezoned to contain children from diverse social class backgrounds. How would you react?" "Suppose that the board decided to bann ability grouping and tracking. How would you react?").

Procedures

Six high-income parents from the different school zones were initially contacted, told that we were interested in their opinions about education, and then arrangements were made to interview them in their homes. The names of additional neighborhood parents were obtained from the original six mothers. All of those contacted agreed to be interviewed.

Data Analysis

The responses to specific questions were coded and sorted according to type and valence of reply, then entire narratives were perused in search of responses relevant to themes (e.g., signs of class identity and affiliation, indications of educational values). Hence, there was a thematic clustering of responses. In addition to reporting what was directly said (i.e., face value, surface, or explicit meaning), an attempt was made to delve below the surface to interpret subtleties such as emotionality, intensity, and tone (defensive, embarrassed) and for significance of terminology ("brains," "know-nothings," "respectable people," "cream of the crop") in parents' narratives. Results are presented as summaries of results, tables with quantifiable data, and as direct quotes of respondents selected to represent or illustrate majority,

minority, and idiosyncratic perspectives.

RESULTS

Identification and Affiliation

Because of their caution in talking about social class, high-income parents' notions about class affiliations had to be gleaned from indirect messages in the narratives. Evelyn said: This town does not do well with bright children and also with low-income kids it is problematic. The ideal student is the doctor's or lawyer's child--traditional--teachers are comfortable with them." Their sense of their own class was demonstrated by their use of us/them terminology in discussing high- and low-income schools and high- and low-income school patrons.

In discussing the cognitive characteristics of students, mothers categorized high-income students as intelligent and low-income as unintelligent. Descriptions of their own children (e.g., "all have been successful in school," "they're high achievers," "his learning ability is above average," "higher than average in academic success," "my son had honors courses," "both are very active in different activities and leadership positions," "a good student with natural ability who went beyond what was expected of him," "my children are more disciplined and more stimulated to learn," "academically-oriented kids," "they're in gifted and talented classes") indicated they believed them to be more intelligent than average.

In contrast, low-income kids were described as motivationally, if not intellectually, different (e.g., "low-income kids don't see school as important," "getting good grades does not matter for them," "parents don't value education," "these kids are not expected to go to college not because they can't afford it but because it is not part of their game plan," "have modest aspirations," "they are more concerned with getting a job"). Based on substitute teaching experience, Dana had concluded: "lower-income kids have less respect and less desire to learn." Catherine stated: "It has to do with ability. Sometimes kids from low-income groups don't have the ability and some who have ability with more encouragement and nourishment can use that ability more effectively, but they don't get it from their family and they don't see it as important."

Parents' Educational Values

Mothers repeatedly stressed the importance of education. As Leili said: "Learning dominated all my life during the time I was in elementary and high school. I was learning in the morning as in the evening --it developed a habit in me of learning." When specifically asked about their preferences for the nature of schools and the desired outcomes of education, mothers waxed eloquently about idealistic, if vague, goals. Phoebe felt "creativity and independence" that allowed "flexibility and individualization" should be encouraged. Finley stated: "Helping my kids become good citizens weighs most heavily with me." Martha felt: "Students should learn at their own pace and not by a certain time that school requires. Schools should allow kids to learn whatever they want to learn -- let them have choices."

Margaret felt the purpose of education was: "To develop creative imagination, a quality which is adaptive and allows you to function in society. Public education stifles this creative imagination." Margaret voiced numerous complaints about schools. At one point she said: "Public schools are all wrong. They should be concerned with creating a flexible, adaptible person who would be able to deal with the modern world." At another she volunteered: "A certain level of education is necessary to deal with life, but it is overdone. We don't have to have all these math skills or world literature. A well-adjusted human being is what schools should focus on; also environmental problems. Education is tied to the business world and has failed to achieve human aspects of education." Yet, indications that concern about her own children's academic advancement dominated Margaret's interview. She wanted her children to be separated from children with too many emotional problems (i.e., low-income children), because such children "would draw attention away from ordinary (i.e., her own) children." Like others, Margaret definitely wanted her children to develop the skills -- and the status in school -- necessary to get ahead. Being successful in academic competition was foremost in mothers' minds.

Often mothers started out idealistic, then ended up with a specifically academic (or materialistic) focus. Lynn first said school was to "prepare you for a happy life," then added: "especially when you live in a materialistic world where you have to have skills that are appreciated in the market." Starting out broad, Sally then retreated to basic academics: "To lead one out of childhood and to adulthood; to function as adults and be considerate of others so that you work with others in harmony and so we appreciate our heritage so we have to be able to read and write -- this is the basis of education." More directly to the point, Phoebe argued: "School was founded and instituted because it was thought that certain basic knowledge was important for citizens. School experience should be academic and can't deal with social problems. So it should be for the basic skills and academics." Carol even pointed out the distinction between the theory and practice: "Theoretically to make people aware of themselves, to get a job; for my children to make them better people, better citizens. To pass on the culture of the Western world and get a good job." With a hedonistic flavor, Bryn stated: "School has two major purposes: (1) to make your life enjoyable and broaden your mind so that you appreciate and enjoy life; (2) improve your standard of living so that you earn a good income and have opportunity to do what you like to do." Perhaps because they did not want to sound crass, they hid real desires in idealistic rhetoric.

Most respondents spoke of their own schooling with nostalgia and pride; school was a setting where they had established personal efficacy. Lynn confided: "I went to Catholic schools and one of the worst things was the oppresive religious atmosphere, but the best thing was that I was a good student. I had confidence in myself and my success." Jeanne said: "I went to an average public high school without a wealth of resources in terms of either facility or faculty, but I got a solid education and was well-prepared for the university." Reynolds had gone "to

a good school that had high academic standards." Rachel recalled: "I went to a large city school with a large number of elective courses. There were more course offerings than they have here and they were more advanced. I was also involved in the gifted and talented program between sixth and eighth grades."

Those who had gone to private schools told of the virtues of high standards, set curriculum, or rigor. As Phoebe said: "My education was narrow, but quality. It was old-fashioned. What was taught was well-done." Sally said: "I went to boarding school and got a classical education that is only available in the best prep schools in the east. There was nothing bad about it." Peggy had also gone "to a private school with small classes and very dedicated teachers with an atmosphere of curiosity and valuing the pursuit of knowledge, which is lacking now for my children." Leili had "a better understanding of literature and science -- much more appreciation of present and old literature."

In comparing their offsprings' education to their own, again, the emphasis on structure and standards came through. Jeanne judged: "My peer culture esteemed high academic performance and theirs does not. In my experience discipline worked." Linda said: "My child's eduction wasn't as interesting or as challenging as mine." Peggy complained: "It bothered me seeing the natural curiosity of my kids almost systematically dampened by busy work and boring assignments." Evelyn complained: "They were not given a choice about what they wanted to learn about. They were given a topic to write about and were not allowed to work with other children. They were lectured to. They were not given the opportunity to work with ideas." Finley said: "The history textbooks are disappointing because of excluding religious reference or major wars. We moved from Michigan where they were in Catholic school and had a lot of reading and a good curriculum in literature. The whole thing was based on reading -- I was very satisfied with that system. This system stresses reading, but not as much. We miss the structure." Evelyn believed: "Learning was more valued when I was in school." Sally contrasted: "Mine was private education and theirs is public. We were supposed to be self-disciplined, polite, and responsible. We had to do assignments, which is not true anymore. Today they wouldn't go beyond the requirements." Reynolds said: "Unlike my boys, I didn't think that school was a waste of time. The curriculum was tougher and there was more of an emphasis on academics." Leili criticized: "It is not comparable. It is much more superficial and materialistic. There is no real understanding of the purpose of life."

Some had more mixed or ambivalent feelings about the differences. Peggy felt: "They missed a lot in terms of academic challenge but gained in the wider spectrum of different social groups. I'm not sure it was as enriching as mine was or as it could have been." Phoebe said: "Their education has not been as rigorous and the quality of some of the teaching is poor, but there is more social development." Dana felt: "It is becoming better than mine. They have had more critical thinking. But, it is still not as challenging as I want it to be so I challenge him at home."

Mothers' wishes for education were generally confused and conflicted; they criticized school as boring and irrelevant and talked about "creativity" and "natural curiosity," but the narratives revealed a view of knowledge as basically static and predetermined, something to be learned in a lock-step, top-down fashion from experts. In fact, their deep down wish seemed to be for a set curriculum in which their offspring could demonstrate "knowing more" or "be better at." The talk about independence and creativity clashed with desires for academic push and worries about their children's test scores. Sandra confessed: "I am concerned about finances, curriculum, discipline, test scores." Bryn worried that "Schools are not preparing kids academically so that they can compete with kids all over the world. We're falling behind. They should be more challenging." Ann Marie said: "They had nice experiences but schools could have been academically more rigid." Evelyn said: "My own school experience was more rigorous and yet more liberal. Learning was more valued. My children's was less rigorous academically."

There were few signs of respect for teachers. Only a couple appeared to identify with them or were cognizant of the heavy demands on teachers. One of Lynn's greatest concerns was the "quality of teachers -- for us this is a big issue!" Catherine believed: "Teachers' salaries are low so that there is a problem in attracting quality teachers." At another point she said she was "concerned about the quality of educational programs; whether they have good teachers who know the materials they should know and are expanding their learning and knowledge." Peggy said: "My children's teachers were not stimulating -- they were boring." Their criticism was personalized in that it focused on teachers as individuals and not the structure of the educational system.

Views of Parental Influence

A few mothers guiltily confessed they had not "helped their children" as much as they would have liked, but most patted themselves on the back for their children's success in school. Reynolds said: "If parents value education and learning that will influence the kid. Class background has to do with what you have and get before you start school and in school they use these advantages. So high-income kids have advantages in school with everything else being equal." Sally maintained: "People who value education and put a price on it provide a home environment that encourages education by books, monitoring t.v. watching, traveling, conversation at dinner tables. These increase their common knowledge of culture. If you don't have these then you have differences. The family has a tremendous responsibility--schools can do only so much and they are limited in every way, financial and otherwise." In discussing the quality of education, Dana said: "My son had a reasonable education but we supplemented it at home often." Ann Marie generalized: "If kids are not stimulated at home they'll be indifferent in school." Margaret felt: "Our kids have benefitted from the home parental environment. Home has the strongest influence." Sally elaborated:

> People who value education and put a price on it provide a home environment that encourages education

> by providing books, monitoring television watching, traveling, conversation at dinner tables. These increase kids common knowledge of culture. If you don't have these, then you have differences. The family has a tremendous reponsibility--schools can do only so much and they are limited in every way, financial and otherwise.

Bryn stated: "Educated parents value and encourage educational success." In discussing why she wanted her children to attend high-income schools, Reynolds stated: "Kids learn from each other -- they must go where kids are inquisitive and parents value education." Sally emphasized: "It's important for kids to have a lot of stimulation. We provided a lot of that: books, traveling in this country and Europe, talking about things. We did not expect school to do everything." Carol replied: "My kids education was adequate, but not great. If kids have parents who don't help them then it is terrible for them. For many years we fought the school board but now I'm not worried about my children anymore (they had graduated); for my friends' kids I'm worried because teachers and administrators don't share the same kind of philosophy."

Construing Other Parents

Most high-income mothers had a cultural deprivation perspective of the nature of poor people; they assumed parenting was inadequate, especially achievement facilitating behaviors (see Table 3).

Table 3: Reasons for Social Class Differences

Cultural Deprivation Theory	8
Oppressive Conditions	4
Teachers' Expectations	4
Blame System/Power Relations	2
Denial of Differences	2

Sally maintained:

> People who value education and put a price on it provide a home environment that encourages education by having books, monitoring t.v. watching, traveling, by conversation at dinner tables. These increase their common knowledge of culture. If you don't have these then you have differences. The family has a tremendous responsibility -- schools can do only so much and they are limited in every way, financial and otherwise. Educated parents value and encourage educational success.

Some put sole blame for academic deficits on values and lifestyles. Leili believed: "Low-income kids have a chaotic life

and homes where there are no discussions about the goals in kids' lives or what goes on in school in terms of assignments." Finley felt that "differences result from factors such as broken homes or alcoholism." Carlotta elaborated:

> My guess is that low-income parents are more concerned with their kids getting a high school diploma and finding a job than going to college -- than broadening horizons. They are less interested in the education of girls. High-income people emphasize high academic achievement and going to college for both sexes. Low-income deemphasize ars and music.

Phoebe's construction of deprivationist theory was fairly typical:

> Low-income kids are not usually exposed to books, printed material, and language use before school so they are not prepared when they start school. Also noise, crowdedness, and economic insecurity undermine a child's psychological growth before he goes to school. Most parents of whatever class have positive feelings about kids' experiences in elementary school. Only later, in high school, when school impinges on family life (more homework, longer day) so that the child can't do as many chores around the house -- then the family is tested about the value of education.

The image of low-income parents--hence children--not valuing education reverberated through the affluent mothers' narratives, although some appeared cautious in expressing judgments, perhaps to avoid seeming prejudiced.

Reynold's views came out in her discussion of why she wanted her boys to attend high-income schools:

> Kids learn from each other--they must go where kids are inquisitive and parents value education. If parents value education and learning that will influence the kid. Class background has to do with what you have and get before you start school and in school they use these advantages.

Mothers were convinced that low-income parents did not have high aspirations (see Table 4). As Dana said: "There is quite a difference between the classes. Sometimes kids from low-income background have high aspirations but often they don't, whereas high-income kids have high aspirations and are expected to go to college."

Table 4: Perceptions of Aspirations

Aspirations similar for both classes	3
Aspirations dissimilar for classes	9
Aspirations vary within each class	5
Uncertain about aspirations	3

In reference to the need to focus on earning rather than learning, some high-income parents provided empathic rationale for what they believed to be low aspirations among their low-income counterparts. Such evaluations were softened by the recognition of extenuating circumstances. Putting diminished aspirations in the context of necessity, Catherine conjectured: "I can only guess that low-income parents don't have the same kinds of expectations. It is probably more important for them to be earning in a job than to continue education. They have to think about a job and making money." Margaret focused on constraints as she hypothesized: "Poor kids can't get the smae education because of their disrupted home life. The low-income parent has so many problems that they have no energy to provide anything or care for the education of the child."

One of the constraint theories offered by mothers was that low-income parents, regardless of their intentions, were too busy surviving in the midst of poverty to adequately parent. As Margaret volunteered: "A high-income parent has the leisure time and finances to provide extracurricular activities, whereas low-income doesn't." Linda said: "Middle class parents have more time. They play with kids, buy toys, etc. Of course, the problem of money and making ends meet is a big one." These same respondents complained about the difficulty of balancing career and family in their own lives, then proceeded to assert that people of their own class had more time for their children than low-income parents. Occasionally those who revealed (stereotyped) perceptions of unmotivated welfare mothers, turned around and put these same mothers in the position of having little time for their children because of their many duties and responsibilities.

Two mothers indicated that low aspirations were typical of the local poor, but not necessarily poor people elsewhere. Evelyn conjectured: "Low-income, by and large, have modest aspirations for their kids. They don't have high expections and many times their kids stay here and don't expect to leave (this town). I think the expectations here are low compared to other parts of the country." Sally's discourse included theories of localism, town/gown differences, and not valuing school performance or educational attainment as she denied the validity of potential arguments that the poor could not afford college:

> Low-income people in this town don't see school as important. In cities or other places they see school as a chance. Here the difference is not between rich and poor, but between university people and local people. The difference is not money. These kids are not expected to go to college -- not because they can't afford it but because it is not part of their game plan. They may go into the family business. Getting good grades does not matter for them.

Neither Sally nor Evelyn offered rationale for these hunches, but both inferred that differences resulted from intentions rather than circumstances. This finding confirms Bourdieu's (1984) contention that affluent people believe that poor people actually

prefer the lifestyles to which they are condemned (because of lack of funds). But the flawed taste and value position was interwoven with notions about uncontrollable conditions of poverty. For example, a "different socialization context" (i.e., parental expectation) was mixed up with a "lack of access" (i.e., parental ignorance or lack of exposure) explanations by Phoebe:

> Educated parents want the same pattern (of education as their own) for their kids and those who did not go to college probably expect to see the same pattern for their kids. There is a large population that don't seem to know what educational opportunities are available to their kids and don't consider them.

Margaret said: "If you expect kids to go to college they do, but if they are told 'we cannot provide for you or put you through college,' as is the case with low-income parents, then the child will not do so. The expectation is very important." Similarly, Bryn's response was framed within the context of what people want and expect depends on what they currently have: "We all have stereotypes--that higher income parents put more emphasis on success and education--that are not necessarily true. But it is true that you want your child to do better than yourself. In this way the classes may be different."

Only a few mothers were attuned to the possibility of bias and they attributed the actions of high-income parents or school personnel as contributing to social class distinctions. Linda said: "It (educational attainment) is a matter of prestige. High-income parents would be embarrassed if their kids did not go to college. Low-income parents are proud if their children go, but are not embarrassed if they don't." Linda also expressed concern about "difference in the quality of education even in the same school--in the attitude of teachers toward students. Track, discipline, and general attitudes in school bother me." Peggy felt: "Academically-oriented parents pressure their kids intensely. Low-income paarents don't put on that kind of pressure; it's just 'get an education and get a job.'" Lynn clarified:

> Parents aspire to high educational achievement, but low-income parents and kids get beaten out over a period of years although they all start out with high aspirations. There is less opportunity for them because the categorization of them from an early age causes them not to be able to get into advanced classes in middle and high schools. So it starts from elementary school and depends how they are classified.

Views of Status Attainment

When high-income mothers were asked about the major issues facing public education, ten (50%) immediately focused on some variation of a "meeting the needs of diverse students" theme, by which most ultimately meant they wanted their own children to be challenged or, perhaps more to the point, to be separated from the average student. They put great store by the educational

attainment status of their offspring, stressing the imperative of advanced courses and launching into lengthy discussions of their high track placement--or how they were slighted and not appropriately placed. Lynn related:

> In Beauford I had to contact my daughter's teachers about ability groups. In the middle of the year she was ability grouped and was not put into the highest class and I was in a dilemma because I don't believe in ability grouping, but there was a negative impact on her because her social studies teacher called her stupid. I then went to school and asked to transfer her to the other class. My husband also complained after the principal manipulated us into withdrawing the request and our statements about how unhappy she was. She stayed in that class and we couldn't do anything more. We should have taken her out of that school. I blame myself for that. She was really excluded from the advanced classes and was unhappy so I'm happy she is included in them now, but I still don't believe in such programs.

Linda was resentful that: "Our son missed much school between first and fifth grade because he was sick and couldn't participate in tracking. He became like the stereotypic lower-class kid who was not tracked or was not in the gifted and talented program.

At some point during their interviews, almost all mothers conveyed their disappointment that their children were not being "stretched" or "pushed." Bryn responded: "We are not preparing kids academically so that they can compete with kids all over the world. We're falling behind. Schools should be more challenging. My son is not particularly challenged, but (she added) perhaps that has to do with him rather than the schools." Rachel complained: "My sense is that a lot more time has to be spent on basics and less on enrichment for gifted kids." In evaluating schools in the community, she said: "For average students any school is just fine." At another point she confessed to worrying that, although she believed in public education, "the cream is taken off the top by private schools and public schools have to deal with the bottom." Reynolds felt: "My boys education was lacking something. They could have had a better education. As they got older my kids thought that school was a waste of time." Leili judged: "The quality is too low and they don't make the best use of their time. Kids have too much free time and they have poor study habits. Assignments are too limited and outside reading and learning are not encouraged by schools." Ann Marie felt: "Schools could have been academically more rigid. They weren't stretched enough." Sally said: "The school did not make any effort to identify students (at least my kids) who are gifted. Two of my kids were very interested and my daughter was bored. One son was identified as gifted after high school." Lynn complained: "In some classes our daughter is not asked to do much and doesn't learn much. If she is asked to do things she learns a lot."

The Other as Threat or Impediment

The underlying implication of their complaints about their children's schooling was that it was undermined by the necessity of meeting the demands of "others." According to Phoebe: "The biggest problem is finding new ways of dealing with the large population of kids whose backgrounds are not the same--schools have lost flexibility and individualization." Carol felt: "Schools have to deal with kids who get to school without ever having been exposed to reading--that's why literacy is going down." Sally had observed: "As a substitute teacher at North (last year) my experience was that the kids in their sophomore year were not very polite. They have problems with boredom. Students who are not getting anything out of school become discipline problems--it usually starts in middle school and gets worse in high school." Jeanne believed: "The traditional role of providing a quality education has been diverted because of the increasing demand in childraising because of the increasing number of single parents. This has increased pressure on society and schools to provide values and ethics and normative values in the raising of children." Dana said: "A strength of public education is that it provides every child with an an opportunity to learn, especially those who can't afford to go otherwise. Unfortunately, the teacher has to gear toward the average student and that means that the bright ones have to be slowed down and get bored." Sally also felt that "they lower the requirements in order to accommodate everyone" and Bryn complained "they focus on the common denominator." Mothers communicated that separate educational programs were necessary, because otherwise low-income kids would pull their kids down.

School Composition Preferences

Another aspect of status was the class characteristics of schools. All respondents felt that the elementary schools with a preponderance of high-income clientele were the best schools in town (see Table 5). In spite of criticizing the school at an earlier point, when asked about the nature and quality of schools in town, Catherine said: "Kinder (neighborhood school) is one of the top three in town. We felt that Eastside was creative but too unstructured. At Kinder the quality of teaching is good. It's an academic school. Really, the best of local schools -- fantastic!" Evelyn said: "Richards and Kinder are crowded, but they are excellent. They have the reputation of being the best schools." Sally said: "We liked Eastside. That's really why we bought our house, it's in the Eastside district."

TABLE 5: Identification and Evaluation of Schools

	heard of school	know location	know students	quality good	quality average	quality poor	quality nc
H-I 1	20	20	17	10	3	5	2
H-I 2	20	20	13	12	4	0	6

H-I 3	20	19	14	17	1	0	2
H-I 4	20	20	17	19	1	0	0
L-I 1	18	14	3	2	1	2	15
L-I 2	19	18	6	3	1	6	10
L-I 3	19	16	3	4	2	4	10
L-I 4	18	17	7	3	2	8	7

Affluent mothers were more guarded in discussing low-income schools. Rachel said: "Hillview (low-income school) is one of the real neighborhood schools--no better or worse than other schools." In discussing her preferences for the social class composition of schools, Phoebe said: "I'm in favor of a school with pluralism (a healthy mix), but no one group should be dominant. Since kids are different, bright students shouldn't be in the same classes with slower students."

Others were more forthright about their opinions, arguing that predominantly low-income schools had less rigorous standards; that is, standards commensurate with the needs of slower students. Class overtones were fairly blatant. Evelyn said: "Westside and Downing are in economically depressed areas. They are not so demanding." Jill said: " It is good for my kids to be in a mixed school but also have demanding academic standards and it is difficult to have both." Margaret said: "Since teachers have to deal with more problems of low-income, I would not want my children to be where a majority of emotionally disturbed kids are so I would send my kid to a more separated school -- mixed are okay as long as few low-income people are there." Reynolds replied: "I wouldn't want to send my kids where everyone is the same but I wouldn't send them where value is not placed on education." Catherine said: "I want my kids to be with kids who are motivated and interested in learning." Leili asserted: "I just want my children to be with children with educated families who are motivated and have values and goals. I don't want my kids to be a model for other children and feel the gap. I would prefer my kids to go to school separated by social class."

Martha's response was tied to a sense that low-income children would be better off in separate schools: "It is an advantage to have schools that are largely low-income. If they are a minority in a school then their opportunities are limited. But if they don't feel different (in a low-income school) then they will explore more and participate in extracurricular activities."

Sense of Fairness in Education

Few mothers felt that social class discrimination was a problem in local schools. Among the exceptions, Linda stated: "Many teachers emerge from lower-income backgrounds, but as teachers they identify with the middle class and encourage middle class students." Evelyn, a teacher, said: "Teachers reward and reinforce a child whose parents they are comfortable with. More status means that they are comfortable with the school corporation." Catherine said: "Social class has an effect, but I hope there is not much of a problem here. A child from a higher socio-economic group has many more options than a child from a

lower SES group and has more interest in those options."

Leili asserted: Social class background provides the basic stimulation for a child to approach education and peer relationships, programs to participate in and the equipment are there and are presented to the kids, but if the motivation for use is not there, the child won't use it and will do the bare minimum. The social class background provides motivation to make the best or worst use of the same things. Sandra believed: "It should not have any bearing on access to programs and activities, but if you have to work to supplement parents' income you can't take part in activities. Peggy felt: In terms of basic education that is offered if you have teachers with energy and quality. Schools can't compensate for disadvantages in the homes.

A teacher, Dana, attributed social class distinctions to peer interaction or attitudes of low-income people. "Kids look at school from different perspectives. Their (low-income) parents may not be aware of the programs available and kids don't ask either -- they may feel intimidated. Schools try to make sure that programs are for everyone. In terms of peer relationships it is more pronounced in high schools. Low-income kids can't afford to be involved in activities of their wealthier friends." Reynolds discussed the importance of cultural capital: "If parents value education and learning that will influence the kid. Class backgound has to do with what you have and get before you start school and in school they use these advantages. So high-income kids have advantages

Some believed that social class bias was not evident in community schools, although they felt it existed elsewhere. Rachel hypothesized: "In some towns social class has a distinct effect and in this community there is some effect. In inner-city schools (big cities) low-income kids are written off by the system and don't get good teachers because the teachers don't want to go there. Also they have problems of drugs and pregnancy so teachers have a lot more to deal with and teachers rightfully don't enjoy teaching in these situations. This is spreading."

Overlooking the importance of her ability to send her son to private schools, Jeanne elaborated:

> There is a degree of influence, but less in this country than in other countries. In my experience class background has no effect and makes no difference. Curriculum and diversity are not affected by wealth, but by wanting it and getting it. My social background has no effect on schooling except I sent one to a private school because of the kind of structure, wealth of choices that were available. He was not motivated to make the best of what was available in public schools.

Although they were critical of their own children's education, most felt that there was equity in educational programs in the district and that poor children were receiving a good education. When asked whether ability grouping might result in discrimination, Ann Marie said: "Social class wouldn't affect ability grouping because a child is judged in terms of standardized tests." Finley asserted: "You can't make education better for poor kids. Education is there and the way the system

is set up does not deny low-income kids any more than it denies high-income kids. Do not blame the system!" It was clear that many were defensive.

A few mothers discussed the advantages of their affluent/high status positions in interacting with school personnel. Lynn elaborated:

> Social class is a very important factor and it affects schooling profoundly. Teachers look at kids and judge where they come from and evaluate their social class background. We were there to work with my daughter and to intervene. We had the political skills needed to organize things and deal with the bureaucracy. You are not in a weaker position. My daughter was in a low-income school and the local schools didn't teach her for the two years we were there. Parent intervention is an important aspect here, but it should not be needed in an ideal system where things are equitable.

Carol, a teacher herself, believed: "High-income people are not intimidated to go in and talk to teachers or administrators, whereas low-income are and consequently high-income kids get more out of school and are treated differently because school knows parents are watching. There is differential learning, parents being more able to look into programs and many programs are not accessible to poor kids." Sandra said: "High-income parents have higher expectations--at least for performance. They are always there when the kids grades are not great."

There were few signs of respect for teachers, even among those who were or had been teachers. Only rarely did they acknowledge the heavy demands on teachers. One of Lynn's greatest concerns was the "quality of teachers--for us this is a big issue!" Catherine believed: "Teachers' salaries are low so that there is a problem in attracting quality teachers." At another point she said she was "concerned about the quality of educational programs; whether they have good teachers who know the materials they should know and are expanding their learning and knowledge." Peggy said: "My children's teachers were not stimulating--they were boring." Carol replied: "My kids education was adequate, but not great. If kids have parents who don't help them then it is terrible for them. For many years we fought the school board but now I'm not worried about my children anymore (they had graduated); for my friends' kids I'm worried because teachers and administrators don't share the same kind of philosophy." Their criticism was personalized in that it focused on teachers as individuals and not the structure of the educational system.

Limitations

The purpose of this paper was to make the case that affluent parents view children from different income levels distinctly; that is, they see their own children as more intelligent and competent than children of the poor. Further intentions were to document their push for advanced, enriched--and separate--school situations for their own children. Hence, the narratives were

scanned for relevant evidence and quotations were deliberately selected to document these assertions. In other words, the biased, selfish side of this elite group was highlighted. In reality, it must be noted that due to a faulty selection process this was a particularly sensitive, empathic group. We intended to use a neighborhood census approach to locating participants and to some extent we did. In other words we initially identified several households in high-income neighborhoods and then asked the interviewee to recommend neighbors for the study. Unfortunately, many suggested friends who were more interested in education and, perhaps, more attuned to social class issues. Still, it is important to point out how even they get caught up in a competitive, self-serving way of looking at schooling. As Lynn said: "I have mixed feelings about the gifted and talented program although my daughter has benefitted from it. Nevertheless, there was still plendy of evidence to support the hypotheses of the study.

How children perform is likely to be dependent on how they see themselves relative to others. Similarly, what a parent expects from a child is governed by how that child is perceived. Affluent mothers' narratives revealed a number of assumptions about distinctions between children of different social classes. Most described: (1) their own children as being bright and talented; (2) low-income children as less capable and less interested in school; (3) a cultural deprivationist philosophy of socialization; (4) public schools as not serving the needs of their children well; (5) public schools as appropriate for other people's children (i.e., less advanced children); (6) schools as equitable; (7) curriculum as being defined or preestablished, tightly sequential, academic, fact- or skill-based, and Western civilization-oriented; (8) schools as meritocracies, and (9) their preferences for tightening up the rules of the contest and making the rewards greater for the winners (their children).

Implications of Results:

Educators are aware of the advantages of integration of students from various racial and ethic origins and from different social classes. Nevertheless, special education, tracking, ability grouping, and class-homogeneous (neighborhood) schools, which separate and stratify students, predominate. Constituencies are known to vary in cultural capital and clout; resources generally follow and policies and practices generally favor families with more income and more power. If integration is recommended, it is necessary to examine the forces which function to prevent heterogeneous clusterings of students.

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